



Ambassador Wilkins Discusses U.S.-Canadian Relations: USINFO Webchat transcript, March 9

David H. Wilkins, the U.S. ambassador to Canada, discussed U.S.-Canada relations, global problems and current events in a March 9 USINFO Webchat.

Following is the transcript:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Bureau of International Information Programs

Ask the Ambassador: U.S. Canadian Relations

Guest: David H. Wilkins
Date: March 9, 2007
Time: 2 p.m. EST (1900 GMT)

IIP Moderator: Welcome to our webchat! You are invited to begin sending in your questions now. To submit a question, just click on the tab marked "Submit Question or Comment." Type your question or comment into the box provided and click on "submit."

We see your questions coming in, however nothing will appear on this screen until the live webchat begins later today at 14:00 EST.

IIP Moderator: Good afternoon! The webchat will start shortly. You may start sending in your questions now--just click on the tab marked "Submit Question or Comment."

We kindly ask that you let the Ambassador know who you are when you ask a question -- first name and affiliation (businessperson, student, teacher, private citizen, etc.).

Question [Kshitij]: Dear Sir, I am Canadian permanent resident from last 3 years. But I [travel] back and forth to India and Canada due to business in India. I've applied for visitor visa several times but without seeing my documents they just refusing my application and giving me different reasons all the time. I don't understand that how come they think I am not eligible to get visitor visa for US. I've PR card of Canada from last 3 yrs I could become Canadian citizen if I was stayed straight 3 yrs in Canada. If US office in embassy thinks I am planning to settle down in US then I don't understand how come they thinks like that? Please sir let me know what should I do?

Answer [Ambassador Wilkins: Hi Kshitij]. Let me explain. U.S. Law requires that we view every visa applicant as a potential immigrant to the U.S. Every applicant must overcome that presumption by showing their strong family, social and economic ties to another country. Sometimes it takes a new immigrant to Canada time to establish those kinds of strong ties to their new country.

You will just have to make a new interview appointment and reapply for the visa when you feel that you have something new to show to the officers that demonstrates that you are settling down and establishing roots in your new country.

Q [Carolyn Edson]: Uganda is an ally of the USA. Canada and the USA are donors to the Museveni regime. This regime has a miserable human rights record and now is faced with a strike by the judiciary for the interference in the independence of the judiciary by the executive

arm of the government. Since both governments say they are supporters of good governance, accountability and respect for the constitution of Uganda, what is the government of the USA doing to pressure the Museveni Regime to respect the justice system and rule of law which are being flaunted by any standard of international law?

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Although my job as U.S. Ambassador to Canada has nothing to do with the government of Uganda, I know for a fact that both the U.S. and Canada take human rights, good governance, and a free and fair judicial system very seriously. I am sure both our governments are addressing the problems you have raised directly with the government of Uganda and supporting NGO activity that aims to improve the justice system in that country. I am sorry that I cannot be more precise.

Q [Sheila]: A controversial agreement in Canada-US relations is the Security and Prosperity Partnership. Arguably the intention of the SPP is to promote economic security and prosperity for both countries as well as Mexico. This is a complicated problem, and opinions on how to go about solving it vary considerably among economic players (labour and management), academics, economists and other concerned citizens.

My question, then is why only management -- corporate leaders in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico - has had any input into the SPP or its competitive agenda, notably through the creation of an entirely CEO-based North American Competitiveness Council. If the SPP is truly about North American competitiveness, then why are government leaders depending entirely on the opinions of a few dozen corporate leaders instead of widening the debate to include non-corporate actors, politicians, academics, labour unions and the public at large?"

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Sheila, I'm glad you asked that question. There seems to be a lot of misunderstanding about the SPP. First, let me assure you that we are looking to all sectors of society for input on this initiative. We want the discussions to be as broad and transparent as possible.

Although it is true that there is a formal mechanism for corporate input into the SPP process through the North American Competitiveness Council, the SPP's initiatives and milestones with timelines are available to the public. This information can be found by clicking the Report to Leaders link at www.spp.gov. The website contains an SPP Comment Form to enable any interested person to provide input directly to the various working groups. Moreover, U.S. agencies involved with the SPP regularly update and consult with Members of Congress on our efforts and plans.

For the next Report to Leaders, we have tasked SPP working groups and coordinators with revitalizing and streamlining their work plans to ensure that initiatives are more focused and results-oriented. We discussed the importance of transparency and communication with stakeholders and the public, and directed officials to expand their efforts in this regard. We also asked officials to pursue greater coordination amongst various working groups and initiatives in recognition that many issues cut across security and prosperity.

I'd encourage you to read through the report and provide us with your comments. Involved citizens like you keep our democracies strong!

Q [cario irc]: DEAR MR. AMBASSADOR; Do USA and Canada have the same point towards the UN reform? ALI EID, CARIO

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Ali Eid, yes, I believe we do. Both our countries believe that we must ensure the highest standards of integrity and promote efficiency within the UN system, so that all member states receive the greatest benefit from resources invested in the institution. Meaningful institutional reform must include measures to improve internal oversight and accountability, to identify cost and savings, and to allocate resources to high priority programs and offices.

Q [Joash_Fang]: Dear Ambassador, my name is Joash, and I am a university student. (I was just told by the moderator to include my name and affiliation). I submitted my question several minutes ago, but in the interest of clarity, I will type it again. Recently, an article in one of Vancouver's (BC) newspaper writes about FBI and DEA agents working in Canada, at the bequest of Canadian police forces.

My question is, despite the invitation by Canadian police, isn't this an erosion of Canadian sovereignty? The US would not normally grant the right to another country's police force to conduct their own investigation on US territories, so why is it possible for FBI and DEA to do their investigation in Canada?

Thank you very much, Joash Fang

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Thank you for your question, Joash. It is true that we have DEA and FBI representatives stationed here in Canada at the request of the Canadian government. They have no legal authority here, however they work hand-in-hand with Canadian law enforcement officials on criminal matters that affect both countries. Similarly, the government of Canada has stationed RCMP officials in the United States in Washington and Miami to liaise in the same manner.

Cooperating in this manner does not erode the sovereignty of either country, it enhances it. Thank you for your question.

Q [MLister]: Ambassador Wilkins: How can Canada and United States better align their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? What are the opportunities for, and challenges in the way of, a bi-lateral policy response to climate change?

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Canada and the United States are cooperating in a variety of ways to address climate change. Canada has partnered with us in the Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum, the International Partnership for the Hydrogen Economy and the Methane-to-Markets Partnership, as examples. The U.S. will continue to work with Canada as Canada develops its climate change plan. You should be aware that the United States takes the climate change challenge seriously. We have spent nearly \$29 billion since 2001 on science and technology to address climate-change.

Q [Colour]: Has the election of a new Democratic Congress (Senate and House of Representatives) had any effect on the implementation of the WHTI?

Business person Halifax, Nova Scotia

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: The WHTI was passed by a large bipartisan majority of Congress in 2004. While the 110th Congress certainly has the authority to rescind or amend this law, no legislation has been voted on or passed in the new Congress.

Q [qehpolisci12]: Ambassador Wilkins, Thank you very much for providing us the opportunity to chat with you today. How would you describe the relationship between our two countries in a nutshell?

Stephen Coats, Political Science 12 Teacher, Queen Elizabeth High School

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Stephen, you asked me to describe it in a nutshell, so I will: VERY POSITIVE.

Q [NIC]: Paul, teacher at North Island College: Are you satisfied with the current level of border security between our two countries or do you anticipate further tightening of the American side?

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Thank you for your question, Paul. The United States and Canada are working together to increase the security as well as the efficiency of the border between our two countries. We are not "tightening" the border. We are making it smarter, so that people and goods can continue to cross the border in a smooth and efficient manner. A smart and secure border is in everybody's interest and will help to promote the prosperity of both countries.

Q [cario irc]: Dear Sir/What about the Environmental policy in [USA-CANADA]?

ALI EID, CARIO

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Ali Eid, Thanks for this important question. But it is so broad I hardly know where to start. As you might expect, environmental policies in both Canada and the United States cover the whole range of issues, from wilderness conservation to water and air pollution to combating the trade in endangered wildlife to climate change. We have excellent cooperation with Canada on this wide range of environmental issues, and we customarily work cooperatively with Canada, as appropriate, in the international arena.

Given its importance and recent high profile, I suspect you may be asking specifically about climate change. The United States is very concerned about climate change, and Canadian leaders have also made clear their commitment to combat climate change. In the United States we are working hard to develop the technologies that will allow us to reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases at the same time as we continue to grow our economy.

Since President Bush took office in 2001, the United States has committed nearly \$29 billion more than any other country in the world to develop and deploy these technologies and for other climate-related programs, and in his last State of the Union message, President Bush announced new initiatives to reduce the consumption of gasoline in the US transportation sector by 20 percent over the next 10 years. The savings in greenhouse gases emissions will be equal to taking 26 million cars off the road. We are making good progress in meeting the goal the President announced of reducing the intensity of greenhouse gases by 18 percent by 2012.

Canada is also working to reduce its emissions, but I would suggest you ask the Canadian Embassy in Cairo for more specifics.

Q [qehpolisci12]: Ambassador Wilkins, How can Canada be a better ally to the United States?

Julia Black, Student, Queen Elizabeth High School

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Both countries are continuously striving to improve the bilateral relationship. We already have the strongest and friendliest partnership between any two countries on earth. Perhaps the most important lesson I have learned is that we must never take each other for granted.

Q [Madeline Koch]: Hello, Ambassador Wilkins. Sheila asked about the SPP. Is the Report to the Leaders due before the leaders meet later this year? Do you know if the date or location have been set for that meeting yet?

Madeline Koch, G8 Research Group, Toronto.

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Hi Madeline, Yes, the report is due before their meeting. The report will be discussed by leaders and made public at that time. I can confirm that there will be an SPP Leaders Meeting somewhere in Canada later this year. The exact place and date still has not yet been determined.

Q [NIC]: Sandy -- Student: What is the rationale for not recognizing Canadian sovereignty over the North West Passage and the Canadian Arctic?

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: United States recognizes that Canada has sovereignty over its arctic islands, where we disagree is the status of the Northwest Passage. The United States position, one we share with the European Union and other countries, is that the Northwest Passage is a strait for international navigation.

Q [MLister]: Hi Mr. Ambassador: Allow me to re-submit my question with my name.

I am Michael Lister, a Research Associate with the Public Policy Forum in Ottawa.

My questions have to do with climate change. How can Canada and the United States better align their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? Is a bi-lateral policy response to climate change both possible and useful (e.g. harmonizing regulations)?

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Michael, thanks for your clarification. We are already working to better align many of our policy responses to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. In my previous answer, I noted several of the international initiatives where we cooperate with Canada. We are also working on similar approaches such as with emissions from the transport sector and measures to jointly address air pollutants.

Because climate change can't be confined to just one country, bilateral and multilateral responses are particularly helpful. We value our cooperation with Canada on climate change.

Q [qehpolisci12]: We have just finished a unit on leadership. If you had been tasked to choose a great leader - from the past or now - to present to the class who would you have selected and why?

Stephen Coats

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Stephen, that is a great question and obviously could generate many different examples of great leadership. Certainly one example would be Abraham Lincoln who led my country through a very difficult time in its history.

Q [Calin Ratis]: Ambassador Wilkins, my name is Calin Ratis and I am an intern with the US Commercial Service in Toronto. I had the great pleasure to meet you at the AmCham, Toronto chapter annual general board members meeting. Canada and US are each-others' biggest trading partners and have a strong and healthy relationship. As you mentioned earlier on the topic of border security, the two countries are "making it smarter, so that people and goods can continue to cross the border in a smooth and efficient manner." This is evidently going to ease and possibly increase the trade flow between the two countries.

How else can we increase the flow of goods and services between the two countries to make sure that commerce will continue to play a major role in the relationship?

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: That's one of the objectives of the Security and Prosperity Partnership -- to simplify and harmonize regulations between our three countries to the greatest extent possible. We respect the sovereignty of each country, but there are common denominators that can be identified. We will continue to modernize the infrastructure on the border to further facilitate trade and travel.

C [qehpolisci12]: On behalf of all of us assembled here in Halifax...in the wee hours before our March Break...thank you very much for taking the time to make yourself available to chat. We look forward to future opportunities such as this.

Best regards, Stephen Coats, QEHS

Q [David Gough - AmCham Atlantic]: Dear Amb. Wilkins - considering the importance of innovation and technology advancement to both the US and Canadian economies, and Mr. Gates' recent comments on the lack of new HB1 Visas to supply firms like Microsoft, and given the special trade and immigration relationships between the US and Canada, do you have any thoughts on whether some form of technology/business partnership could be discussed or created between the US and Canada to alleviate the US skills shortage and take advantage of the available Canadian brain power to in effect develop a 'made-in' or 'win-win' North American solution that would benefit both countries?

Thank you. Regards; David Gough Chairman, Atlantic Chapter, The American Chamber of Commerce in Canada

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: NAFTA created a class of work permits or "visas" that facilitates the movement of skilled scientists, engineers and other professionals to move among the NAFTA countries. Nevertheless, we do hear a lot of discussion about further enhancing labor mobility in North America. The Security and Prosperity Partnership recently received the advice of the North American Competitiveness Council and is now assessing which of these suggestions we might move forward on. The Canada-California Strategic Innovation Partnership is another avenue where our two countries are exploring how to leverage our respective brain-power.

So, yes, we are working together to alleviate skill shortages and enhance the North American position in the global economy. Thanks for your question, and take a look at the link below for more details on the [NACC](#) report.

Q [Irob2]: Mr. Ambassador, these days there is a lot of distrust between the citizens and the way justice is handled in courts, do you feel that this is a topic both the U.S and Canada should be working together with to try and remedy –

Iain Robertson, Queen Elizabeth High

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: We are two countries that exemplify the Rule of Law. It is up to the elected officials of both countries to determine the specifics of the Justice System in their respective countries. Each country determines its system of justice independently. Any distrust of the system could be overcome by becoming involved in the legal system, say as a juror. An informed citizenry is the best support of a healthy Judicial System.

C [Irob2]: I would like to thank you Mr. Ambassador for taking time out of your heavy schedule to address some of the concerns we have.

Iain Robertson, QEHS

Q [Joash_Fang]: Dear Ambassador, this is Joash (student from Vancouver, BC) again. It seems there are less questions now, so perhaps I could ask a second question. As you know, Canada has over 2000 soldiers stationed in Afghanistan, and recently, parliament has voted to extend the mission until 2009. However, many Canadians are skeptical about the mission in Afghanistan. I was wondering, how important is Canada's contribution in Afghanistan to the US and the Bush administration? And is the extension of the mission to 2009 sufficient, or would the US like Canadian troops to stay longer?

Thank you very much, Joash Fang

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Thank you for another good question. Canada's contribution in Afghanistan is vitally important for all freedom loving people around the world. Everyone recognizes that Canada is doing the real heavy lifting in the southern part of Afghanistan, and the world thanks you for that.

Q [Irob2]: Good afternoon, this is a follow up question to the earlier one about the Green House problem we are currently experiencing. You stated that the U.S has spent \$29 billion over the last years, but with the current estimations and projections of Green House gases within the next 25 years being astronomically high, do you believe the money you are putting into this research is being used as effectively as it could be?

Iain Robertson - QEH Poli-Sci

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Thanks for your question, Iain. The United States is spending more money on technology and research in the area of climate change than any other country in the world. This degree of funding is commensurate with the seriousness of the problem. We think our approaches -- concentrating on new technologies -- provide the best opportunities to stabilize and eventually reduce emissions while maintaining economic growth. Many of these initiatives will achieve their intended effect only after several years. Climate change is a problem that developed over many years -- it will take us some years to tackle it.

Q [NIC]: Rick-teacher: Why does the US not adopt the carbon market model as a partial solution to green house emissions?

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Rick, Thanks for asking about carbon markets. You may know there are a number of proposals now before Congress that would establish carbon markets (or "cap and trade"). Economic theory suggests these could be effective, but we have been concerned that putting hard limits on carbon emissions will damage our economy at this time. Our research is focused on measures to reduce GHG emissions without harming the economy.

Q [qehpolisci12]: Here in the Maritimes we eat a lot of fish. Recent studies have shown that we have alarming increases in the amount of mercury in some species of fish we consume. We live in what is known as the exhaust pipe of North America. How concerned is the present US Administration with the environment?

Nathan Secord, QEHS student

A [Ambassador Wilkins]: Nathan, The environment is a major concern for the U.S. government: this is precisely why we are devoting such huge resources to addressing environmental issues such as climate change.

Ambassador Wilkins: A sincere thanks to all our participants from throughout Canada. This on-line dialogue has given me an opportunity to hear directly from you, our Canadian neighbors. The friendship that Canada and the United States share is unique in the world. We have the largest trading partnership the world has ever known. We share the largest undefended border in the world. There are so many strong and wonderful connections that unite our two countries. I've been here for over 22 months now, and I must say that it has been the privilege of a lifetime to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Canada. I've learned so much from the many wonderful Canadians whom I've met, and I look forward to learning more from you in the future.

Again, thank you for your participation. David H. Wilkins

IIP Moderator: We would like to thank Ambassador Wilkins for joining us today. The webchat is now closed. A transcript of today's webchat will be available on the USINFO [webchat station](#) homepage within one business day.

Participants in today's webchat are welcome to join future USINFO global webchats.